

PANAMA CANAL: THE CHANNEL BETWEEN THE SEAS

This thematic exhibit was a labor of love because of my life's journey. I was a civil engineer and worked for the Navy and a marine construction company for forty years. The highlight of my career was being part of the St. Lawrence Seaway project. My interest became greater when I started to collect Canal Zone stamps and covers.

The story of the Panama Canal goes all the way back to Columbus who anchored his ships off the Coast of Panama but never went ashore, up to the end of the century when President Carter transferred the Canal Zone back to Panama.

In between these two events is a history of a body of land 42 miles long which will compare to any other for the drama, mystery, disease, scandal and engineering marvel that changed the history of the world and how nations operate.

The interesting part of this exhibit for me were the different countries (Spain, Great Britain, France and most of South America) that played an important part in the development of the Panama Canal. As early as the 1500's, Spain had thoughts of some kind of Isthmus crossing and even had surveys made. The United States was very interested but never got serious until the Spanish-American war and the need for naval vessels in both oceans and a quick way to transfer same.

France lead the way on its failed attempt to cross the Isthmus, but their endeavor was doomed from the start because of engineering design and disease. The United States was next and learned from France's mistakes that locks were needed and the area had to be cleaned up and free of tropical diseases. The rest is history.

Some of the unusual philatelic items which are of special interest include: Venezuela cover on page # 3, Panama R.R certificate on page # 22, 1850 folded letter cancelled by two ship lines on page # 26, 1866 French Renard essay on page # 36, 1880 French Canal Co. certificate on page # 40, 1909 U.S.S. Wisconsin cancel on post card on page # 53, Clara Maass maximum card on page # 58, New Caledonia color proof pair on page # 70, Official Business cover with perforated "P" on stamps on page # 100, Panama proof on page # 114 and Panama invert on page # 122. Note: unusual items have arrow indicators.

Additional pages covering the history of the Panama Canal were added in chapter two. Before the Canal was built during the 1800s, mail between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans had to travel by land through Panama and a special group of "Forwarders" were started. Their job was to make sure the mail was transferred from one coast to the other, to the respected vessels. One unique cover has three forwarders all on the same cover, on page # 30.

The following reference material was used to develop the story line of this exhibit: David McCullough; "The Path Between The Seas".